

Culture Basics

WESTERN

Task Oriented

- efficiency and time high priorities
- communication must be accurate
- right and wrong
- by appointment only
- prompt

Direct Communication

- get right down to business
- short, direct answers
- a yes is a yes and a no is a no

Individualism

- self standing person, own identity
- don't need anyone else
- expected to take initiative
- enjoy time and space to self
- privacy and confidentiality important

Driven

- disciplined, structured
- plan ahead, use time efficiently
- go getters
- rules and laws important and enforced

Cross gender interaction

- how you may interact with other genders is perceived as no different than interactions between persons of the same gender, there are no explicit cultural prohibitions on friendship or casual interaction other than personal beliefs

EASTERN

Relationship Oriented

- people trump everything
- feel good atmosphere
- honor and shame
- hospitality important
- time is negotiable

Indirect Communication

- take the long way around
- do not confront, offend, or embarrass
- stories, parables and metaphors

Group Identity

- identity is tied to group (family, tribe, etc.)
- do not expect to have to stand alone
- depend on group
- don't understand being alone
- privacy not important

Responding

- respond to what life brings
- experience the moment
- informal, unstructured, flexible
- laws not always enforced

Boundaries exist between M/F

- many unspoken rules govern interaction
- woven with "honor" and "godliness"
- greetings
- no public display of affection
- dress
- visits

Some pointers for Westerners to help relationships begin well:

- **Stand up to greet-** this is a basic show of respect, your international friends would never shake hands sitting down
- **Don't show bottom of feet-** considered disrespectful, with or without shoes
- **Take toilet paper with you-** your international friends may not use it in their house, as water is more common
- **Don't use your left hand-** left hand is considered dirty/unclean
- **Show that drinking tap water is okay-** most refugees have never lived in a country where they can drink tap water, so take a cup out of their cabinet and fill it with tap water and drink it to demonstrate its safety; this may save them lots of money in the long run
- **T.V. etiquette-** many Middle Eastern families will always have their television on when they have visitors; it is part of hospitality
- **Pets-** it is not normal in most countries to have pets in the home, and many of our Muslim friends consider dogs to be unclean; so it's a good idea to introduce them slowly and perhaps not on the first visit
- **Be cautious about gender boundaries-** It's a good idea to follow their lead and greet them the way they feel comfortable. You may show respect to and greet your Muslim friends by placing your right hand on your chest in lieu of a handshake.
- **Practice hospitality-** this is the love language of many of our international friends; if you do nothing else, please invite them to your home for a meal; it will bless their socks off!
- **Consider dietary restrictions before you cook-** simply ask them if there is anything they don't eat before you prepare a meal, or do your research on the internet if there is a language barrier- you can always show pictures.
- **Be aware of personal space differences-** in the U.S. people consider social distance 4-12 feet. Any closer is uncomfortable and considered private or intimate space. Many people from other parts of the world consider social space inches from each other or even touching. Backing up may be perceived as rude. You can always point out the differences to your international friends and explore them together.

For more detailed information on the diversity of and within specific cultures see the Refugee Backgrounders on the Cultural Orientation page at:

<http://www.culturalorientation.net/learning/backgrounders>